



Writing and Submitting an Op-Ed

Many publications run a page of opinion columns and letters opposite the editorial page. This is why the term “opposite editorial,” or “op-ed,” is used to describe this section of the newspaper. Significant ideas and issues are debated on the op-ed page, making it an ideal place to raise awareness about **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** and to address the more general, yet critical issues related to substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery.

Writing an op-ed puts you or another individual in your organization in the role of a columnist: expressing personal viewpoints, while providing the facts. To assist you, a sample op-ed template is provided at the end of this document, on the enclosed CD-ROM, and on the official **Recovery Month** Web site, www.recoverymonth.gov.

Remember These Tips...

- **Develop an outline** – This will help you stay focused and will act as a reminder to cover key points.
- **Stick to one subject** – Focusing on a single message is the most effective way to persuade the reader and reinforce your point.
- **Express an opinion** – Be direct about your viewpoint from the beginning.
- **Keep it simple** – Avoid using terms or acronyms unfamiliar to those outside the field. Short yet compelling words and sentences can get the reader’s attention; by using them, you will cast a wider net. Most newspapers are written for readers at the fifth-grade level.
- **Provide background information** – Do not assume your readers are knowledgeable about the issue. Paint a broad picture of the problem, offering recent developments in the field.
- **Support your position** – Presenting statistics and recent study results adds credibility and context—but be cautious not to bury your audience in numbers or create misunderstandings with technical data.
- **Use evocative anecdotes** – Referencing recent local or national stories or providing a personal anecdote will help increase understanding of the issue and bring your piece to life.
- **Localize it** – In addition to national statistics, include local data about people with substance use disorders and the estimated number of people who need treatment, but do not receive it. To find these statistics, contact your state’s Single-State Agency listed in the “Resources” section of this planning toolkit. Inquire about both public and private patient census information. State and local information is also available from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) **2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings** at www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm. Local treatment facilities also may have information.

- **Be succinct** – Keep your op-ed to about 500 words—less is more. If you would like to write a shorter piece, you can write a 250-word letter to the editor instead of an op-ed. Letters to the editor usually reference a recent news story or event, and can be used to tell a personal story to help erode the stigma surrounding substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery.
- **Identify yourself** – At the end of your op-ed, include, in *italics*, your full name, daytime phone number, e-mail address, and a brief description of who you are and why you are an expert on the subject.

Submit Your Op-Ed...

When submitting an op-ed to your local newspaper, start early. Some newspapers can receive up to 500 submissions per week. About two months before **Recovery Month** activities kick off, call your local newspaper and ask for the name of the editorial page editor to contact. Because editors are often extremely busy, be respectful of their time and try to take just a few minutes to introduce yourself and explain the issue. Practice what you will say before you call to ensure you can speak firmly and eloquently about your op-ed. Tell the editor that you are interested in submitting an op-ed during **Recovery Month** in September, and ask about any specific guidelines (such as word count or submission deadlines), and tips on what would help ensure placement.

Most editors have preferences on how they wish to receive an op-ed submission. Some may ask you to send it via U.S. mail, although many prefer submissions by e-mail and fax. Please follow their preferred methods and include a cover letter that briefly reminds the editor who you are. Provide enough background information about **Recovery Month** so they know why your op-ed should be printed in September. If you have had previous conversations with the editor, reference them in your cover letter. The letter should be brief, explaining why your thoughts on the subject are important to the newspaper's readers. Allow the editorial staff about a week to review the piece, then make a follow-up phone call to the editor to confirm the op-ed was received and answer any questions.

You are encouraged to share your plans and activities for **Recovery Month 2006** with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), your colleagues, and the general public by posting them on the official **Recovery Month** Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov. By sharing creative executions and activities, you are helping to generate momentum, thereby furthering effective outreach that will touch the lives of millions of people.

To share your outreach efforts and community success stories during **Recovery Month**, please complete the Customer Satisfaction Form in this planning toolkit. Instructions are included on the form.

Please send samples of your organization's **Recovery Month** promotional materials to: Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs, SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1 Choke Cherry Road, 2nd Floor, Rockville, MD 20857.

Sample **Recovery Month** materials are available electronically on the CD-ROM in this planning toolkit. For additional **Recovery Month** materials, visit the **Recovery Month** Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov or call 1-800-662-HELP. For additional information about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery, please visit SAMHSA's Web site at www.samhsa.gov.



Approximately 515 Words: Please Adapt as Needed.

[Date]

Educate, Don't Discriminate: People in Recovery Speak Out

As many as 74 percent of Americans say that addiction to alcohol has had some impact on them at some point in their lives, whether it was their own personal addiction, that of a friend or family member, or any other experience with addiction. This is an increase from a similar study in 2004, in which a 63-percent majority of Americans said that addiction to either drugs or alcohol has had a great deal or some impact on their lives.

Yet many people in treatment and recovery face stigma and discrimination, which can be a barrier to receiving treatment. According to the **2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings**, in 2004, 21.6 percent of the 1.2 million people who felt they needed treatment but did not receive it indicated it was because of reasons related to stigma. In another survey, 40 percent of people in the recovery community said they thought embarrassment or shame was their biggest obstacle to receiving treatment, and 19 percent were afraid of being fired or discriminated against if they entered treatment.

[City or region] is not immune. In [state], [number] people suffer from substance use disorders, and countless numbers of those are unable to receive the same employment and health care options as someone with other chronic disorders, such as diabetes.

We owe it to our neighbors and friends to support treatment and recovery as effective ways to confront substance use disorders. Substance use disorders are diseases that can be treated just as any other chronic illness. The people of [city] need to understand the harmful effects of stigma and discrimination on people trying to attain treatment or who are in recovery. We can teach people how to spot the signs of substance use disorders among family, friends, and fellow community members, and ensure that they receive the services and support needed to work toward recovery.

When stigma and discrimination decline, more people in recovery from substance use disorders will likely reach out for invaluable support from their peers. For example, [name of facility] in [city] works to inform our residents of the importance of treatment and encourages people to share their personal stories of having a substance use disorder and the possibility of recovery.

To promote the hopeful and healing message of recovery, [name of organization] is participating in the 17th annual observance of **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**, a nationwide initiative every September supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

[Name of organization] is holding a variety of fun and educational events this month to coincide with this year's **Recovery Month** theme: ***"Join the Voices for Recovery: Build a Stronger, Healthier Community."*** The events include: **[briefly list events/activities]**.

By participating in **Recovery Month**, you are supporting those already in recovery and encouraging those in need of help to seek treatment. Learning about these issues will make it easier to break down barriers to treatment. And it requires everyone's help to build a stronger, healthier community—together.

[Your full name] is **[insert your title/affiliation or other role in the substance use disorder field]**.